

Letter written by DE KILGOUR after the death of Ellie his first wife & mother of  
Joe, Sandra & John.

year 1916

Shortly after Mother's death

To My Dear Children:

It is just a little over a month ago, April 29th, that your mother and I had dinner together at the King Edward hotel in honor of our wedding anniversary. Beautiful always, she looked extremely well, that night and certainly no one who could have seen her would have imagined for a moment that there was present the source of trouble, which so soon was to be the cause of her death. But external appearances are not always a sure sign of health, and that night though happy and bright, she was really not feeling well and instead of staying out late as we had planned we returned home shortly after dinner. The fact is, your mother had not been well for some time, and though not at any time acutely ill, was nervous and would tire easily. It developed from an examination by the doctor, not long before this, that there was a slight internal growth - at first supposed to be malignant but found on pathological examination to be benign in character. Whether this had conduced to her nervousness I do not know, but it might easily have done so, and at her own request as well as on the advice of the doctor, it was decided to have the growth removed. So by arrangement she went into the hospital (St Michael) on Sunday night, the 30th of April for the operation which was to take place on the following morning.

I suppose that any one who has to undergo an operation with the necessary anesthetic, is subject to a certain hazard, and I know that as we packed her grip and as she said good-bye to you all, I at least could not help wondering whether all would be well and whether she would return to us as she left - only improved by the operation. I know that your mother had counted on the possibility of not coming back, because shortly before, she prepared a memorandum providing for the disposition of some of her personal effects. But this was only a precautionary measure and was not prompted by any genuine apprehension as to the outcome, indeed so trivial did the operation seem to be that it could have been attended to at home except for the inconvenience and annoyance to the patient in need of a rest.

For nearly nine days after the operation - because she stood it well and her only sickness was that resulting from the anesthetic and lasted only a day - she made continuous progress. Her temperature and pulse were normal and though she was not permitted to get up, she would sit up in bed and was as active as one could possibly be under the circumstances. I would call in the morning before going to the office, bring the morning paper and spend an half hour or so with her. At noon I would go again to see her and also in the afternoon, occasionally remaining until I was turned out at a quarter to nine - the retiring time for hospital visitors. On Sunday night, that is just one week after the operation, I took Sandy to the hospital to see his mother and together we picked a number of our own tulips and other early flowers for her room. Just before saying good-bye your mother said 'Well Sandy I'll be home in two or three days now.' Mary also saw her mother being taken by Sarah during the week. Was it a premonition I wonder that after she had left the room and was about to enter the elevator that Mary suddenly ran back, and called to her mother 'I'll come back again Mummy.' Her mother heard her though the door was closed and said 'That's a good girl Mary, I know you'll be back



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soon.' Mary was much admired by the nurses and sisters and not the least I think because she looked so much like her mother, to whom all were most deeply attached.

On Tuesday morning that is the ninth day I called in the morning as usual and received your mother's consent to spend the afternoon at golf. I had been in almost continuous attendance and was suffering from a protracted cold and she readily consented to my going. This day I shall never forget. In the first place the hour spent in the morning together was one of unusual sweetness. Temperamentally, perhaps, unlike, it was only natural that as normal people we would differ sometimes but our differences were never lasting nor serious. That morning we felt how despicable and small, even minor differences were, and we vowed together that with a mutual and deep love which always existed, there would ever go sympathy, tolerance and forbearance. For us both, these were moments of passionate and pure love, of love that exalted and ennobled. We looked into the future, with our little family about us, happy and contented, we thought of prospective material advancements in which you and we would share and of how when you had homes of your own, we would still have each other. Nor was hope absent that the sands of time would pass evenly for us both, and that neither should long be compelled to suffer the pangs which separation and Death bring. In the evening on my return home, I had a telephone message that your mother had been attacked during the day by an acute pain in the region of the abdomen and had been vomiting intermittently. On my arrival at the hospital about 8 O'clock, I found her suffering considerably, and was told that her condition was very suggestive of an attack of appendicitis.

On the following day her condition became worse, and we called in consultation Dr. Bruce - the city's leading surgeon. On examination he said her condition was extremely critical and that she was suffering from general peritonitis - he thought from a ruptured appendix - and that he was doubtful if she would be able to stand an operation. This however was clearly the only chance, and at nine O'clock that evening (Wednesday) Dr. Bruce operated and discovered as he had anticipated that the abdominal region was full of puss. So far as he could determine however, on/hasty examination, he could find no focus for this - the appendix was sound; nor did it seem that the original wound was in any way infected, an improbability after nine days, when infection from an operation usually results in two or three days. Neither Dr. Bruce nor Dr. McCullough (who was your mother's and our family doctor and who had performed the first operation) appeared to be able to assign any cause to the infection. Nor can speculation on the subject though causing heart burnings and anguish lead anywhere. I believe that the cause of the infection must remain a mystery, and that we must be content to regard it as one of the cruelly unfortunate accidents of nature.

Entirely against the expectation of the doctors she came through the operation well; good drainage was established and her condition at the end of the first day was markedly improved. Before the operation Dr. Bruce told me that the chances of her recovery were less than one in 50 and that it was altogether improbable that she would last thirty-six hours. To the astonishment however of all, the progress of the first day continued and at the end of the third day her condition was such that that Dr. ~~XXXX~~ McCullough believed that the chances were altogether in her favour and Dr.



Bruce considered them extremely 'good' though he warned me that the danger point had not quite passed. This was Saturday, and as my cold was getting 'worse' and as I did not wish to stay too much in the 'sick' room and thus endanger the patient with a cold infection I felt it safe and wiser to go home that night (since Tuesday I had a room in a nearby hotel). On Sunday afternoon I received a telephone call from Dr. McCullough to the effect that there was a slight set-back, that a stitch infection from the drainage had set in, and that it had spread over the abdomen. On my arrival at the hospital I became only too soon aware of the extreme gravity of her condition. Perhaps innocent in itself, the secondary infection was clearly going to be more than she could stand after what she had gone through - her temperature was up and her pulse was very rapid and feeble. Clearly the end was in sight. One could not tell however how long she would last. She remained conscious and except for short periods of sleep she was mentally unusually alert throughout Sunday night and most of Monday morning. Nor was she in great pain though suffering from inability to breathe easily. At noon of Monday she lapsed into unconsciousness and breathed her last a few minutes after six of the same day - May the 15th.

During the day there was beside myself in almost constant attendance her mother who had arrived about 9 O'clock in the morning after a hurried trip from California. Others who saw her that day your Aunt Edith and Aunt Annie, your Uncle Walter, my cousin Mrs. Ward (Ethel Tolton), Hugh Kilgour and Ollie's friend Miss Bessie Young. Mr. Back the Presbyterian minister in our home district, and a close friend of ours was present during the afternoon and knelt with your grandmother and myself as her spirit left, in thanks for the life that had been given us, and for the hope that we had of meeting our loved one again.

I do not wish to dwell too much on the scene of death - but for me it has now no terrors, and for your dear mother it had none whatever. Mr. Back who had called two or three times before during her illness, during the critical period as well as before, told me that he had never seen another person, fear death less or who was prepared to accept the inevitable with so sweet a spirit and with such a serene confidence. She had a simple faith unaffected by dogmas or doubt. She believed in a God of Love and though she loved this life ardently and as only one can who has a happy and loving nature, and though she strongly desired to remain with us, she knew that for her and for us, when we became re-united there would be better and happier days in a better and happier land. In a spirit almost of exaltation she exclaimed near the end 'I feel that I am going on a great adventure' and in another breath 'Some have gone before, some are passing and some are very very near.' But for your dear mother it was not the adventure of doubt, but of one who had lived a sweet and pure life and who though loath to leave us was supremely hopeful and confident of the future.

There are those who believe that all human events are divinely ordained and that they occur with inexorable precision, whether we will or not. Your mother firmly believed that if it was her time to go, she would go and if it was intended she should live, she would remain. And it was perhaps this conviction that made it so seemingly easy for her to accept the inevitable. In the trying hours before lapsing into unconsciousness your mother's thoughts dwelt little on her actual passing, but her mind alert almost subdely so would fix on those about her. Nor till the last, did she lose her keen sense of humor. At one moment she turned to the doctor and looking at me, asked him to remove the undertaker as he had come too soon. Feeling as I did I know that



I must have been looking very gloomy and your mother's comment on my appearance though somewhat grim and suggestive, was enough for the moment to make me smile a little and to forget my grief. Your mother made a passing remark to your Aunt Annie about the wicked - in what connection I cannot recall - but lest anyone should think that she had reference to herself she turned with a laugh - 'but I assure you I was not alluding to myself.' Turning later to the attendant nurse - a Catholic - she observed half seriously, half humorously 'I want you to know that I am not going to purgatory.' Thus from one to another her thoughts would turn. She admired the hat your Aunt Edith wore and asked her to turn around so she could see it better - an interest due to the fact that she had helped to select the hat. To your Uncle Walter whom she liked very much 'Walter your' a good boy.' To Mrs. Ward - 'Ethel you will let your kiddies play with mine,' and to Bessie Young 'Be good to Errett, Bessie, he is such a lonely boy.' Then thinking of herself 'How have the mighty fallen.' And when her mother asked the nurse in a whisper, if she knew she was going to die, your mother replied with emphasis 'Indeed I do.' Still again to relieve the general depression - 'Now Jack (Dr. McCullough) for a change please make a speech.' To the reply 'Ollie I don't know how to' she said 'Well Jack you can at least say 'Unaccustomed as I am to public speaking.''

The fatal poison was fast having its effect on our darling, and about ten O'clock your grandmother and I were alone with her. It became an effort for her to say anything and a little later and not long before she fell asleep, completely worn out and in great distress she said to us 'I wish it were over now.'

Sweetheart of my youth, comrade of my life, mother of my children, in the truest and highest sense my better half - the darling for whom, if possible I would a thousand times have given my life, my all, God was soon to take her. What thoughts then surged through my aching brain I cannot put in words. For you, these reflections are perhaps neither helpful nor natural, but the time will come when ~~you~~ even you my dear children will be confronted with the stern verities of life and death, when those nearest and dearest to you must leave. At that time Faith and Hope can alone comfort you.

I wish I had the ability to write a complete story of your mother's life, because few characters were more beautiful or lives more replete with sweetness, or more unaffectedly simple. At the funeral service Mr. Back referred especially to her simplicity of character, of her naturalness both distinguishing attributes of that Perfect one. Though your mother had opportunities of travel and education, given to very few she retained to the last her simple and childlike unaffectedness that was really the keynote of her life. Your mother was essentially honest and fair - not as we give measure for measure - but generous, desiring to treat others as she would have others treat her. Although like most others, disliking to be imposed on, the idea of taking the slightest advantage of anyone, of getting more than she paid for, of striking an unfair bargain was utterly foreign to her nature and repugnant to her. In our domestic arrangements we were singularly fortunate in keeping help. Those who lived with us were assistants not servants and in so far as was possible were treated as members of the family. The result was that those who worked for your mother were devotedly attached to her and loved her, as few mistresses I am sure were ever loved before. I cannot think of anything sweeter or more natural than the attachment of Sarah our colored Jamaican who was with us at the time of her death. At the hospital the night before her death Sarah called and before she left your mother said 'Come here Sarah and give me a real ~~big~~ good hug.' and they embraced one another as ardent-



ly as the most devoted of lovers. Indeed it was necessary to know your mother to appraise her real worth. Her eyes so beautiful so kindly reflected a soul of singular purity. There was a smile for everyone, a kind word, a thoughtful enquiry, a humorous observation, all calculated to make the recipient happier and better. A neighbor though only a casual acquaintance told me that he had never seen in all his life, a sweeter smile nor a more expressive and lovable countenance. One could tell from her mere expression that she was a woman of rarely beautiful character. Mr. Garland a very wealthy neighbor and man over seventy-five years old, though he only knew her slightly came to the funeral as a mark of respect. He had met your mother on the street; and had liked and respected her. He knew that she was genuine and possessed a truly lovable nature. There were many wet eyes, he said, in North Toronto when your wife died. And how I could multiply the evidence not only of her friends, but of mere acquaintances.

An outstanding characteristic of your mother was her keen sense of humor. She loved a good story and could tell one most effectively. Indeed she used to regard it almost a sin to be lacking in humor and to regard oneself too seriously, she considered a sign of egotism. But her humor was never unkind or ungenerous a course. It was the product of a very subtle intellect; and of a happy and joyous outlook. With her, in truth 'humor was the darling child' of ingenuousness.' What was sweeter, what more truly humorous than her remark to Mr. Back as he was about to pray at her bedside 'Dont you think you aught to hold a lady's hand when you pray.'